

Local plovers have bad year

But state numbers show increase

By KENDRA JOHNSON
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PLYMOUTH — Despite the low number of piping plover chicks in Plymouth this summer, the statewide population of the threatened birds is on the rise.

Only two of the 11 plover pairs on Plymouth Long Beach this summer raised chicks to the point that they could fly.

The first pair successfully fledged three chicks, after losing one to unknown causes, said Plymouth natural resources officer Owen Muise.

The second pair is caring for one chick that is expected to fledge next week, Muise said. The chick hatched from the only egg that survived after a new-moon high tide on July 14 destroyed the birds' nest.

Long Beach was home to 12 plover pairs last year. Muise said the number of plovers on the beach had increased in preceding years.

In Plymouth, Muise said an average of 1.5 chicks normally fledge per plover pair, which is also the state's goal. But by the end of the month, only four chicks will have fledged from a total of 11 plover pairs.

Muise said foxes have been the major problem for the birds this year. They have eaten eggs and scared birds into abandoning their nests.

"We had a bad year," Muise said.

Foxes have also terrorized plovers on Duxbury Beach, where 12 plover pairs fledged 11 chicks. Duxbury endangered species officer Ryan Chandler said the same number of pairs fledged 28 chicks last year.

But experts say the statewide numbers for the federally threatened



File photo

Piping plovers on Plymouth's Long Beach and Duxbury Beach did not have a good year this year.

birds are promising.

Preliminary figures show that there were 515 breeding plover pairs at about 100 sites throughout the state. An average of 1.55 chicks were fledged per pair, according to the state Division of Fisheries and Wildlife.

The numbers are up from last year, when 495 pairs fledged an average of 1.5 chicks.

"The state has had an exceptionally good year," said Scott Hecker, director of the Massachusetts Audubon Society's coastal waterbird program.

The plover season is coming to an end, and the birds have started leaving northern beaches before the cold weather arrives. Plymouth has fewer than half of its 11 original pairs. But there are still about a



File photo

Plover eggs are vulnerable to many predators because of their location on beaches.

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dozen pairs on the beach because some birds flew from further north, having begun the migrating process, Muise said.

The number of terns statewide has also increased between four and seven percent, preliminary state records show.

Tern site managers reported more than 13,900 common terns, nearly 3,200 least terns and about 1,800 endangered roseate terns.

"All in all, terns have had a good year in Massachusetts," Muise said. The 5,000 pairs of common terns

that fled foxes on Long Beach in June have been located on three Cape Cod beaches. The group was the largest tern colony in New England.

It was fortunate that the birds moved early in the season because they were able to renest after they resettled, said state ornithologist Brad Blodget of the Division of Fisheries.

"Foxes are sort of like the hurricanes. They're very unpredictable from year to year," Blodget said.

State and local officials said they think some of the terns will return to Plymouth next year.